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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the quality and extent of services provided by academic libraries to students with disabilities. The issue of establishing standards for such services is considered, and while the author notes the formidable difficulties involved in establishing such standards, he asserts that standards must be developed and implemented. He cautions that the services provided to physically impaired students must be at least as good as those offered to other students and that staff must be more concerned with the actual service provided than with procedures and processes involved. Further, he suggests that library staff must be aware of the responsibility of serving disabled students and must communicate that responsibility to the administration. (CL)

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STANDARDS FOR LIBRARY SERVICES TO DISABLED STUDENTS

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The subject of standards is one that can be dull, controversial and complex. My remarks will probably be a little of each.

Standards, to be meaningful and effective, must be both qualitative and quantitative - they are separable only in theory. David Kaser, in an article on college library standards, reminds us that "it is possible to have quantity without quality; it is not possible to have quality without a definite irreducible quantity."[1] In discussing standards as they relate to handicapped students we must divide them into technical standards and service standards. A library, for example, must have stack aisles that are at least 33" wide - preferably 36" - to accommodate wheel chairs and students on crutches. It is impossible or even unnecessary to have stack aisles wide enough to accommodate two wheel chairs side-by-side. The cost of space necessary to do so in a university library would be prohibitive. You cannot be unrealistic about a standard - it's just ignored. A technical or service standard must be achievable if it is to be creditable to the decision makers.

Many technical standards have been developed and adopted for the physically impaired. The hearing impaired use telecommunication devises such as the standard telephone along with a standard typewriter keyboard. The primary means of communication for the hearing impaired is sign language; closed-captioned TV and captioned films are further examples of the use of standards that are essential if we are to provide the deaf with the opportunity to utilize library services. The visually impaired use braille, cassettes, floppy discs, talking book records - all adhering to standards. Obviously, these technical standards are important but are only the means by which we provide library and information services. Someone needs to determine which books must be available in braille or cassette. Is there a minimun number of titles that

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must be held or be readily available for an academic library? How does a blind student access a database? Is the regular loan period adequate for the disabled student? Reference librarians limit the amount of time they spend in answering a patron's question. Should this limit be the same for a disabled student?

Consider for a moment a blind student who needs to do research for a doctoral dissertation. The material available on a regular or normal basis is restricted to popular and widely used materials. In addition, required text books are also available. What the doctoral student needs, however, is highly specialized materials including some rare book items, manuscripts, and non-book materials. These materials needed exclusively for a particular research requirement must be provided on an individualized basis - a one-to-one educational service.

Obviously this level of service cannot be provided by an academic institution for all of its students or even to all of its handicapped students. Just how do we meet these needs? By the use of volunteers or by friends of the handicapped student? Just how do we develop a realizable and comparable service standard that will address this research need? This is a good example of the difficulty of developing service standards that assure a high level of service and that are achievable. What many academic institutions try to do is to develop a level of service that strikes a balance between the ideal and the practical. What is the library's policy on providing reference services to its regular students and faculty? Does a reference librarian provide assistance for a limited period of time - say five to fifteen minutes - or for whatever time is necessary to meet the needs of the user?

All university libraries have a limited number of librarians, and as a consequence a policy on time limitation on the reference services provided to an individualized user. Should that time limit be the same for the physically impaired? Obviously not. How much additional time is necessary to provide the handicapped with "equal" service? Let's take another example - How do blind students utilize databases? Let's think through the problem and possible solutions. Assume the blind student has learned to type and has been taught to use a terminal keyboard. The student enters the database in a particular subject area and the result is a large number of citations. How does the student review these? By a braille printout capability on the terminal? How can the

student narrow the search without having to review all of the citations? How does he scan or browse?

How do you develop a standard that describes the right of the blind student to direct access to databases and database searching? Is it really achievable? It's easy enough to make a statement, but how do you translate it into a meaningful service? We can, of course, emphasize the need for the services of a reference librarian to work directly with the blind student. We teach students in our library school the techniques of interviewing or negotiating with the patron in trying to ascertain just what information is really needed. In the case of the blind student and database searching, the reference librarian, after negotiations, could do the search, review the items with the student and determine the specific citations needed. This is a personalized service. How long would it take? Is the time the library has established as the norm for regular users adequate for handicapped students? The issue is complex; it involves service standards, availability and competence of staff, possibly terminals with braille capability both on the keyboard and the printer.

My concern is with the quality and extent of services provided by the academic institution. Can we describe these services in both a qualitative and quantitative way so we can measure the success and effectiveness of our services? And just how do we compare with other institutions on the level and quality of the services we provide? After all, we are constantly comparing people and institutions - number of students and faculty, variety of course offerings, amount of research, the quality of athletic teams, the number of our graduates who are in major public and private positions, etc. Do we shy away from standards because they are difficult to determine and implement? Is that really a valid reason for trying to find an alternative? In the past we have determined our standards on the basis of expert opinion and experience. More recently we have turned to research, the use of actual practice, and the involvement of the user. In fact, we have "fudged" and called our efforts guidelines. We insist that the answer is not standards, but a process - a planning process - that will permit each library to evaluate itself against itself. We insist that output measures are more valid than input measures even when the basic statistic is the same. The difference is how we massage and manipulate the data. In all of this debate we often lose sight of our goal - service to people - at this conference, service to the disabled student.

Standards, guidelines, the planning processes are not ends unto themselves, but means toward achieving a level of service that will meet the needs and expectations of our users. Libraries, like other institutions, are uneven in the quality and quantity of service they provide. How do we measure the satisfaction rate of the disabled academic student on an academic campus? Do we just assume that if we provide special parking places, ramps, wide aisles, some materials in braille and cassettes, improved visuals throughout the library, that we are providing a high quality or even a minimal level of service? What about our staff - do we have enough; are they specially trained? Are they sensitive to the problems and attitudes of our handicapped students? Has our staff received any training in interpersonal relationships? What about costs? Is it more costly to provide services on an equal level to the handicapped student? You and I know that this is so, but does the academic administration know it? And, more importantly, is it reflected in the budget?

Can we establish a base - a safety net - by developing standards that we can all use to measure our efforts? We certainly, if reluctantly, accept grading systems, accreditation, required number of course hours, required degrees for faculty, etc. These are standards that are quantifiable and, hopefully, give some indication of quality. It may be difficult and controversial but we must develop and implement standards and guidelines for services to the handicapped. The planning process must be an integral part of the standards. Evaluation must be an integral part of planning. Services to the handicapped students must be an integral part of the library's total services. In my view, the real difficulty is not so much in the development of the standards, or in the acceptance of the standards officially, but in the implementation. Will libraries accept them as being realistic and realizable? Is there any incentive for working towards meeting them? The planning and evaluation process is difficult, time consuming, and costly. Will the library accept the responsibility for undertaking the process?

Let's assume that a library does develop a plan and works toward meeting the standards. Does this automatically result in quality services? How do we know unless we make provisions for continuous evaluation? User satisfaction is the ultimate measure.

The Library of Congress's National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies are currently engaged in the revision of the 1979 standards of service

for the LC network of libraries for the blind and physically handicapped. As project coordinator I can assure you that we are trying to reflect in the revision some answers to the concerns that I have raised. We are, for example, involving the user community - the American Council for the Blind, the National Federation of the Blind, and the National Association of the Physically Handicapped. We are using the expertise and experience of those who are responsible for providing services to the blind and physically handicapped at the national. regional and sub-regional levels. We are widely sharing our drafts, holding open hearings, and utilizing the research that was undertaken by Battelle, Inc., for the Library of Congress, National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Our goal is not to reinvent the wheel, i.e., rewriting every current standard, every sentence. We will retain what is still valid. Neither are we "striking out in new directions." Our goal is simply to provide a set of standards that are realistic and achievable. Standards that will be measurable and meaningful. We will provide some guidelines in parallel to the standards where that is useful. The glossary will be consistent with existing glossaries and will contain all of the pertinent definitions. And we intend to meet our schedule - publication by ALA Annual Conference, 1984.

In 1981 the ASCLA standards for Library Service to the Deaf Sub-committee prepared and issued a report, "Techniques for Library Service to the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing." It provides guidance to all types of libraries in the areas of communications, resources, publicity, programs, participation and staffing.

If we are to really mainstream the physically impaired, then we must provide them with a level of service that is at least as good as the service we provide our other users. It must be effective service - the user satisfaction rate must be high. Our staff must be committed to a service philosophy, not the archival/preservation philosophy. We must be more concerned with the actual service provided rather than the process and procedures for providing the service. It is too easy to become "efficient" and cost effective at the expense of our services. Cost and lack of funds is more often than not an excuse for inaction. We are reluctant to resolve problems - especially difficult ones such as service to the physically handicapped. No matter how effective and relevant a set of standards may be on paper, the test of success is the implementation and evaluation of the actual services provided to the disabled

student. All of you at this conference are, of course, dedicated to serving the disabled student in academic institutions. But that is not enough. We must make sure that all of our service staff is aware of the responsibility of serving the disabled student. We need to make sure that our academic administrations are not only aware, but fiscally committed.

Remember, standards are only a means by which we measure and evaluate the success of the goals and objectives that we developed in our long-range program. Standards, to be successful, must be realistic, achievable, and implementable.

[1] Kaser, David, "Standards for College Libraries" Library Trends, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 9.